Easing Inez Back to Spring

Trilby and Friends Accidentally Help to Close a Swell Resort Hotel—Put to Flight by a Frisky Bankers' Convention—Back to New York After Failure to Plunge Into Mad Whirl of Life Among the Gay Upper Crusters.

BY SEWELL FORD.

I DON'T care how peeved Bill Bryan gets about it, if he should happen to listen in on this, but my bet is that Darwin had the true dope, after all. We do trace back to the chattering, hairy tribes that paraded through prehistoric tree-tops holding onto each other's tails. For one of our strong points is that we still like to play follow-your-leader. If you don't believe it, watch the new summer styles spread from West 57th street, New York, to Skowhegan, Me.; Toms River, N. J.; La Jolla, Cal., and Moose Jaw, B. C. Not only as to slit sleeves and blouses of periwinkle blue, but as to soft collar bands for young hicks and the width of their straw hat brims.

Then take a flash at our little bunch of serious tourists, shifting plans for a straightaway jump from Florida to Broadway, and making a half-way stop, just because we'd been tipped off that it was the smart thing to do. Of course, they don't put you in a cage for anything like that, but it could be submitted as Exhibit M if the case ever came to trial.

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NOT that we felt a bit sheepish in following the trail of what Duddy Scott had referred to as the best people. Never a bleat out of any of us. Instead we were a bit chesty over it.

"Lot sweller, ain't it?" says Inez. "Stoppin' off, eh?"

"Absolutely," says I. "Shows you're not traveling on round-trip tickets, for one thing; and that you don't care how often Hortense packs and unpacks."

"Hortense?" says Inez, gawping around. "Who's she?"

"She's past tense for some, present tense for others, and future for us?" says I. "I was using Hortense as the group or cluster name for ladies' maids in general."

"Huh!" grunted Inez. "What you wanna talk so much for when it's hot like this?"

And she was right, at that. For when you're ambling up through the middle of Florida early in May, cozily shut up with forty other people in a steel car, you need to save most of your breath to cool your disposition.

I put in the next half hour inventing a Pullman car that would be water-jacketed and have an air intake through the radiator. For winter use you could simply warm the water. I had added a movie screen to one end, radio connections for every seat, a tipless porter who dusted you with a vacuum brush, and I was just debating whether I should accept a royalty of so much a year or sting 'em for a lump sum when—well, about then I must have dozed off, for when I roused up again we were stopping at a station, and right opposite us a gang of darkies was loading a car with watermelons.

"Summertime, eh?" remarks Inez, mopping her fair brow and smearing a streak of soft-coal dust cutely across her countenance.

"It has all the earmarks of that season down here," I agrees.

And it surely did. The palmettos and long-leafed pines looked hot and dusty. So did the sandy streets of the little town we rolled through. We were in midsummer, no matter what the calendar said. We had been eating green corn, Florida peaches, Florida plums, and now here were the watermelons.

"I guess it's hot in that Carolina place, too," suggests Inez.

"I don't see how it can help it," says I.

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THAT night as we pulled out of Jacksonville we had the porter hide the heavy blankets and put the electric fan on at full speed. I expect it's the refined and ladylike act, too, to complain that you never rest well on a sleeper. I used to think it couldn't be done, and for the first few times that I climbed into a berth I'd look forward to a night of tossing around. But I must have a crude streak in my make-up or else I'm distantly related to the Pullman family. Anyway, the one spot where I'm sure of getting a good eight or nine hour snooze is when I'm buttoned in behind the green rep curtains.

Of course, you can't tear off the slumber in one continuous strip, the way you can at home. I could if they'd only keep the old train bowling along. But they're not apt to do that; anyway, not on these southern lines, for they surely pull some queer stuff at night with what is supposed to be a through train. They make stops that you can't dope out at all, way off in the country at dinky little stations or sometimes at no station at all; for water, maybe, or at junctions.

It's the sudden stillness that wakes you up, after the steady rattle and bang of the wheels. And generally, out there in the dark and often only a few feet from your pillow, two perfect strangers will appear from somewhere and proceed to get chatty with each other. This time, at some point in Georgia or South Carolina, they stopped under my window, and one man tried to sell the other a second-hand flivver.

Say, I've heard Lizzie owners get enthusiastic over their flying washboilers before, but I never listened to one who was so really eloquent about his machine as this bird. According to him, that little car of his could outpull and outrun anything ever built to go on wheels. He was right there with a record of past performances and all the upkeep statistics.

"Why, lissen, Stacy," says he. "You know that all-fired long hill jest behind Doodleburg, where Jim Tuttle got stuck last fall with that new six-cylinder bus of his'n? Well, sir, I hit that comin' home from town one night last week in th' pourin' rain, an' besides the old woman and the five kids inside I had a new kitchen stove, two kegs of nails and three bunches of green pine shingles tied onto the runnin' boards. Did she lay down on me? No, sir! Took us up on high with never a knock, and when we went past the Gillis place at the top she musta been makin' blamed near 35 an hour."

"Aw, come off, Lem!" protests the other. "That's better work'n any flivver I ever heard of could do. Ain't got any special duflickers on that engine of yours, have you?"

"Well, Stacey," says Lem, "I ain't tellin' everybody, but the fact is I have. Mighty special."

"What, for instance?" demands Stacey.

"It's kind of a secret," says Lem. "But you know that oldest boy of mine, Buster? He's been workin' in a garage down to Raleigh. Came home one Saturday night with something in a gunny sack. Next day he jest naturally took the flivver apart, and before dinner time he'd fitted her with a new pair of glands out of a high-priced car."

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WHETHER Stacey shot from the hip at that, or reached out and hit him with a coupling pin, I shall never know, for just about then our wandering locomotive came sneaking back, bumped up with a crash that set everything jingling in nine cars, and then after a series of shrill toots got the train under way again. And in three minutes, more or less, I had forgotten and forgiven Lem and was being lulled to sleep once more by the rap-trip-a-trap of the rails and the soothing hum of the electric fan.

"PARDON, MISS," SAYS HE, "BUT IT IS ALMOST THE END OF THE SEASON, YOU SEE. IT IS ALWAYS LIKE THIS DURING THE LAST WEEK."

It must have been nearly 8 o'clock next morning when I did my death-defying stunt of shinning down from the upper without the aid of the porter stepladder and oozed into the lower berth, where I found Inez with her nose pressed against the pane.

"Look, Trilby May!" says she, excited. "Little leaves! New ones!"

"You're quite right, Inez," says I. "Regular oaks at that. And they're just getting on their spring dress."

"Spring!" says Inez. "We had that and summer already."

"But now we're slipping back again," says I. "If you don't believe it take a sniff of that air straining in through the dust sheet. Some pep and life to that, eh? Real North Carolina mountain air, that is. And for the love of Mike, Inez, throw on some clothes and let's make a break for the dressing room. I'm going to feel the need of some bacon and eggs and hot coffee very soon."

Evidently Inez had similar longings, for she made a quick getaway and in less than twenty minutes we were in the dining car, where we found Uncle Nels and Barry half way through breakfast. What is more comfy or cheering, either, than a bright, newly varnished diner, especially on a morning like this, with the crisp sunshine flashing on the silverware, new scenes sliding past outside, and a smiling darky waiter juggling a loaded tray over your head? I'll say home was never like this.

"Well," says Barry, "we're due at this Pineland joint about 10:30."

"Then we get in with them smart setters, eh?" asks Uncle Nels.

"That's according to the hunch we got from our elegant friend on the yacht," says I. "And I hope we all have costumes sporty enough to make the grade in."

"I'll have to have a pressing job done on my soup-and-fish outfit," adds Barry. "But what about Uncle Nels? How will he get by without a dinner coat?"

"Oh, he'll have to gussie up in his white serge," says I, "and if the head waiter looks shocked, we'll explain that he's an eccentric millionaire who never wears black clothes."

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ANYWAY, we were all set for a plunge into the mad whirl of life among the gay upper crusters, although I suspect most of us were a bit nervous over the prospect. I had made Inez promise not to exercise her gum except in the privacy of her own room, and I'd warned Uncle Nels once more that he must do all his finger-nail amputating before we got there. So I was a little relieved, when we finally pulled into the Pineland station, to notice that we had the station bus all to ourselves.

"Ain't no other swells gettin' off here?" asks Inez.

"Seems not," says I. "Probably they're all on hand."

At least, the doorman and the bellhops seemed glad to see us, and even the room clerk gave us a friendly greeting. Oh, yes, he could give us a whole suite with adjoining rooms. I'll say they were nice quarters, too, with plenty of outside windows and a fine view out across the hills. And when you've been in flat Florida for a few weeks even a mound as big as a haystack looks good.

It wasn't until we grouped ourselves for the grand entry into the dining room at luncheon time that I got my first jar. I had expected to crash in among a mob of smart folks wearing zippy sport clothes and chattering society gossip. And here was this whaling big dining room, with a hundred or more tables, a head waiter and three assistants, and a young army of waitresses and bus boys all in white—and not more than a dozen guests, sitting around lonesome by twos and threes.

"'Are we too early or too late?" whispers Barry.

"Search me," says I. "They must be around somewhere."

But we couldn't find 'em. A few more did straggle in before we had finished our meal, but only three or four out of the whole lot looked like the kind who were used to having their pictures printed in the Sunday supplements or their doings noted in the society columns. One distinguished appearing old boy who wore his eyeglasses on a broad black ribbon I was sure ought to be somebody special, and I nudged Barry to see if he couldn't place him. Barry wasn't certain, but thought he might be a Goelet, or possibly one of the Goulds. And a little later, as we wandered through the almost empty first-floor corridors, we found him behind the counter of a jewelry shop, and he tried to sell me a string of synthetic pearls.

"Maybe all the regular folks are out golfing or motoring and don't eat in the middle of the day," I suggests. "Let's get a car and go scouting around for 'em."

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BUT down at the golf club only a few players were starting off, and although we drove around the country for a couple of hours, we met no high-powered touring cars filled with haughty plutes. However, it was good fun rolling over the red clay roads through the pines and oaks, seeing the spring flowers in the fields, and filling our lungs with the bracing air.

"Anyway," says Barry, "if they're not here they're missing out on something worth while. They don't make much better weather than this anywhere, do they?"

That night at dinner the big dining room was even more lonesome than at noon, and although we all came down dolled in our best, we found very little competition. Fully half of the handful of guests were in street clothes, and by the pile of hand luggage and golf bags stacked in the lobby we guessed that they were ready to flit on the evening train.

"I thought this was a swell place," complains Inez. "What's the matter with everybody?"

"That's one of the little mysteries I mean to get to the bottom of as soon as I've finished my soup," says I. "Here, you!" and I signaled for the imposing head waiter to come over.

"Having a smallpox scare here, or what?" says I.

"Oh, no, miss! Nothing like that," he gasps.

"Then what has happened to all your guests?" I goes on. "You're not going to run a big establishment like this for just us, are you?"

He shrugs his shoulders. "Pardon, miss," says he, "but it is almost the end of the season, you see. It is always like this during the last week."

"I see," says I. "We're taileneders, as it were? Well, we hadn't figured on that exactly. I've never helped to close up a resort hotel, but I can imagine it isn't a very exciting pastime. By tomorrow or next day I suppose we'll be having our meals in the kitchen, eh?"

"No, miss," says he. "By tomorrow there will be plenty of company for you. The bankers are coming."

"Bankers?" says I, gawping.

"State convention, Miss," says he. "We have three or four hundred booked. Some of them will be showing up tonight."

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HE was right. During the evening a dozen or more touring cars drove up and unloaded, but in a big hotel like that half a hundred new arrivals make no showing at all. They seemed to be quiet, small-town people, these North Carolina bankers and their wives, and we watched them filter in with mild curiosity. Most of them acted a bit shy and awed by the size of the place, and the few who got together in groups hardly spoke above a whisper.

But say, by the next noon all was changed. Convention delegates had been swarming in all the morning by rail and motor utnil the lobby, corridors and verandas were full of them. They pinned on badges and began to get acquainted. Committee chairmen buzzed around genial and folksy. Old friends met and slapped each other on the back and introduced their wives. An announcer with a megaphone roared out the program for the day. And at luncheon they crowded the big dining room so full that we were shoved into a corner and almost forgotten by the head waiter. Cut-up members began to make themselves heard. No doubt the lies they pulled were comic enough, but we weren't in on them at all. And when we tried to get to the desk out in the front office we found them lined up three deep, registering, asking questions about this and that, generally monopolizing the attention of the clerks.

We pushed our way through the mob and finally found a clear space at one end of a long parlor, where we could talk without shouting. As usual, Inez was the one to state her mind freely.

"I don't call this swell," says she. "Just messy."

"I'm afraid you're right, Inez," says I. "I wouldn't mind one banker, or two. They're apt to be rather nice, decent people, conservative and somewhat cold in the eye, especially when you're trying to cash a check; but generally pleasant enough after you get to know 'em. I suppose I could stand mixing with half a dozen at a time. Being mobbed by bankers is a different proposition, though. And that's about what this amounts to. They started in mild enough, but now they own the hotel."

"We might snitch a few badges and ring in as bankers ourselves," suggests Barry.

"You'd never qualify, Barry," says I. "You don't look the part. No. We've either got to stick it out or go somewhere else."

"We ain't been to that White Springs place yet," says Uncle Nels.

"Me," says Inez. "I've seen enough of North Carolina. I wanna go by New York."

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"BRILLIANT thought, Inez!" says I. "This idea of being mixed up in a convention, but not part of it, is poor stuff. And I don't care whether there are any smart people on 5th avenue as early as this or not. Even the shop girl flappers will look good to me. Also I've been living in a trunk and suitcase so long that it will seem perfectly heavenly to get back to the old studio and spread out once more. Let's go. Get hold of that head porter, Barry, and see how soon he can dig up reservations. Buy him, if necessary; I'm sure Uncle Nels will finance a move like that."

"You mean I gotta give somebody more tips?" says Uncle Nels. "Well, here's half a dollar."

"For a drawing room and section!" says I. "Why, a head porter wouldn't get you a seat in the station bus for that. Better make it a five and then we may stand some chance of getting out of here tonight."

Uncle Nels groans, but he comes across with the money. "All right," says he, "so long as we get home quick. After that I don't tip nobody for a year."

And it's wonderful how accommodating these people will be after they've been properly insulted. By 9 o'clock that evening, just as the bankers were starting in on what promised to be a big night, we slipped away from the merry throng and boarded a side-tracked sleeper that was waiting to be picked up by a through train bound north.

It was along about noon next day, and somewhere near Trenton, that Inez got her first real homecoming thrill.

"Look, Trilby May!" she exclaimed, grabbing me by the arm. "Apple blossoms!"

"Sure enough," says I. "A whole orchard full of 'em, all pink and white, like a huge bouquet."

"Pretty, eh?" says Inez. "We saw orange blossoms, too, in Florida. Not so nice as these, I think."

"For once, Inez," says I, "our wave lengths are in tune. No poet would agree with us, I expect, and any native of Florida who heard us would probably want to indict us for treason; but I'm trailing right along with you there. Any scrubby old apple tree with half a bloom on it has got it all over the finest orange tree that ever put on all the blossoms it could. That is, so far as looks go. And if I'm ever a bride——"

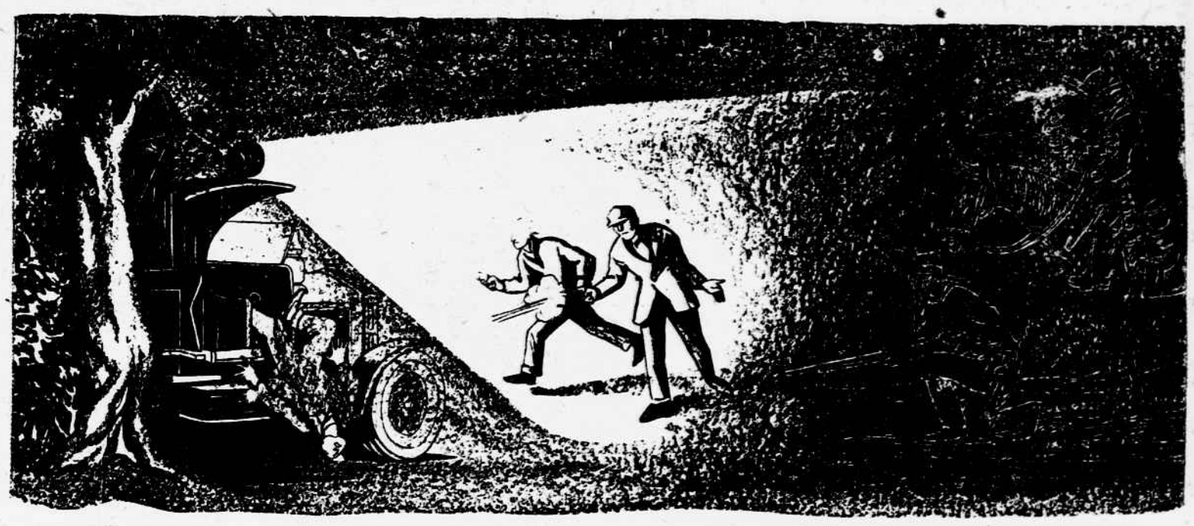
"When you and that Barry Platt gonna get married?" demands Inez.

"Switch it, Inez," says I. "We were talking merely about apple blossoms. There are some more. And just think, old dear, before you know it we'll be back in New York. We can have dinner tonight at Tortoni's."

"Ah,h,h!" says Inez. "Grilled pigs' feet, yes?"

"You've said it, Inez," says I. "Gosh, isnt it great to be home once more!"

BOOZE BURGLARS PREY UPON HOME AND BOOTLEGGER ALIKE



BY E. H. SMITH.

Owner of Cellar Stocks Faces Hopeless Situation When Liquor Is Carried Away—Insurance Cannot Make Good His Loss—One Man Paid $22,000 for Liquid Goods, Only to Have Them Stolen Almost Immediately by Those Who Received His Money—Thirsty Party at Dinner Finds Only Water When Bottles Are Opened.

ALMOST any morning when you take up your newspaper you will find further adventures of the booze burglars. The cellar of a conspicuous millionaire has been broken into and a couple of hundred thousand dollars' worth of fine wines has been carted off. Mr. Somebody has returned from Europe to find the liquor vaults at his country home sadly empty. A warehouse has been entered in the night and many barrels of choice red liquor are somewhere, but not there.

The melancholy part about it all is that there seems to be no satisfactory defense. If a man has his wife's jewels insured he is reasonably protected. If the gems are stolen he can buy others as good with the proceeds of his policies. But if a man's vintages go, no insurance will do him much good or greatly solace his palate. Fine wines cannot be replaced today even if one is willing to go to the bootleggers, violate the law and pay the extortionate prices. Again, insurance on drinkables is high priced, not easy to get and never issued in sufficient amount to cover the replacement value of stocks in hand.

Yet the companies which do issue insurance policies on liquors have their side of the story to tell. They have paid losses of $3,000,000 within the single year 1921, they assert, and they estimate that this figure covers probably only one-third of the actual thefts in wet goods.

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BEFORE prohibition, liquor stealing was confined to bartenders, butlers and maidservants. The stuff that dreams are made of wasn't valuable enough to take a risk for. When a man could go round the corner and buy good champagne for $30 a case and fine rye for $11, who would bother to steal it? But when doubtful sparkling wines bring from $100 to $150 a dozen quarts, and fair whiskies as much, that's a different matter. A whole new criminal population has been created by these exorbitant values, just as happened when silks went skyrocketing during the war.

New York city and the outlying country places of its residents have been the special victims of one set of booze burglars. There has been some talk, because of the similarity in technique displayed by these fellows, of a master mind and a centralized traffic in burglarized liquors, but there is no real foundation for this theory. Jewel robbers always operate in very much the same manner, but no one supposes that they are all working under one guiding intelligence. Yet there is a certain loose centralization to the booze burglar business. It was not created by them, but existed ready made—another of the children of prohibition. Bootlegged liquor in New York is distributed today, more or less exclusively, through certain definite channels. The independent bootlegger has to go to these people and make an arrangement with them or he is soon out of business and probably in jail. Thus stolen drinkables also pass through this central organization, at least in large part, but the "big fellows" don't direct the stealing. They simply ask no questions, take their part of the graft and allow the stolen goods to be sold without much risk to the seller, who is either the thief or his agent.

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WHO the booze burglars are and how they operate is one of the most interesting features of the underworld story of prohibition. In parts these people are old offenders. Some were house burglars and jewel robbers before prohibition made life simpler for them. Others were previously honest and respectable people who have been corrupted by opportunity and temptation.

The house burglar and jewel robber saw at the beginning of things that liquor provided a kind of loot for which there was an existing, highly organized and safely protected distribution organization catering to a large and constant demand. It was not like stealing the silver or jewelry of a rich family and then being forced to dispose of the stuff to a fence at a cut-throat price, the fence taking the risks of disposal. Liquor was and is constantly being dealt in largely and quasi openly. In most cases the man whose drinkables are stolen has also been guilty of some technical violation of the prohibition law and is in no position to raise much of a row. So, why not steal liquor, dispose of it at a high price and make a fortune? Safer, saner and more lucrative than any other form of crime.

To operate this game successfully the housebreaker and jewel robber needed to do nothing new in their professions. This type of criminal has always operated through corrupted servants. Each gang has always had in its employ butlers and woman servants who were got into the houses of wealthy people by one subterfuge or the other. The crooked servants surveyed the house, found out where the valuables were hidden and how they might be reached. This done, the actual burglar or jewel robber appeared on the scene and "did his stuff." Where there was no chance of introducing a member of the gang into the house, the burglars set about luring and corrupting one of the servants. It was often possible to find chauffeurs, butlers, valets and other man servants who would listen to their reason. In other instances good looking young crooks were employed to court the maids, win them over and then use them.

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PRECISELY the same thing is being done in the matter of the liquor burglars. At least half of them are inside jobs or jobs done with help from inside. In other cases the servants have needed no outside stimulus to wrongdoing. They have seen the piled-up liquid wealth of their masters and been tempted to arrange for its theft. Several cases of this sort came to public notice in New York last year and many others got no airing.

But the older criminals also often operate without the aid of venal servants. Attacks of this sort are generally made against unoccupied houses whose owners have been rash enough not to remove their stores of liquor. In such cases it is merely a question of information gathering. The crooks must be sure that the house they are about to rob actually has a worth-while stock of liquor in the cellars. Here, again, a servant may be used as scout and supplier of the needed details, but there are many other ways of coming into possession of accurate knowledge.

The robbers may note the house of some convivial family and watch it, at the end of the season, to see whether the surplus stocks are hauled back to the city when the season in the country closes. The crooks have ways of watching the removal permits in the office of the prohibition director. They know that Mr. Richley has not been permitted to move his supply to the city from his suburban place and they take advantage of this fact. In other instances the employes of burglar alarm companies have been bought. A man has an electric burglar alarm attached to his wine cellar door. The mechanic who installs the device sees the heavy stocks of liquors and unconsciously calculates the value. A little later he is dismissed by his company or he needs money badly or he is approached by the booze burglars. He turns in all the information he has, including the secret of the burglar alarm—and the rest can be guessed.

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FINALLY, there is the case of the rich New Yorker who dealt with what he supposed to be a select gang of bootleggers. He had no liquor in his country place, was not permitted to move any out from his town house and lightly turned to law violation to stock his cellar. He bought about $22,000 worth of whiskies, wines and cordials from the bootleggers and had it transported to his Long Island home, paying cash on delivery according to the agreement. But the same night his bootleggers turned burglars, entered the house before any adequate locks or burglar alarms had been installed and stole back their cargo of liquors, carting it off in two large motor trucks. There was no complaint to the police, for the wealthy gentleman was himself guilty of law-breaking and knew it. He hired private detectives, offered to pay a second $22,000 for the return of his drinkables, spent a good deal of money on various investigations and finally got no satisfaction beyond ascertaining that his own bootleggers had robbed him.

Many strange and uncomfortable contretemps have arisen out of this looting of private cellars. One gentleman had invited a large and thirsty party of guests to dinner, but the night before his function his cellar was broken into and every bottle carted away.

Another man opened the Chateau Yquem with a great flourish at a dinner and poured out fine clear water. He called for another bottle, with similar results. Investigation showed that his butler had opened every bottle in the wine closet, disposed of the contents, refilled the bottles and skillfully recorked them. It was an easy coup, for his employer drank only on festive occasions. No wine had been served in months.

I have seen it said in the newspapers that the booze burglars operate by means of high-powered motors, racing cars and the like, and I expect to read next that they are employing airplanes. The facts of the cellar-robbing business are much more commonplace. Nothing is used except motor trucks of the large, slow, heavy type, and always covered. The huge, innocent looking moving van is the favorite vehicle of the robbers. Capacity, and not speed, is the desired thing. The burglars find a house that is accessible, break in or are admitted by servants, carry the liquor out to the waiting truck, load it and drive away to the chosen refuge, where the liquor is hidden until it can be sold.

IT must be apparent to any reasoning person that this kind of work cannot be carried on without thorough and detailed preparation, and probably not without some kind of influential co-operation. The booze burglars first locate the house they want to rob. They then arrange for their truck or trucks, according to the amount of liquor known to be available. They next arrange for some place of concealment. But such a liquor-laden truck must make its way over the roads to the first place of concealment and eventually to the point of distribution. There are, I believe, some fifty thousand policemen, detectives, constables, revenue officers and arms of the law scattered about the metropolitan district, all supposedly bound to suppress the liquor traffic and certainly all charged with thief and burglar taking. How these trucks manage to get past all these official gentlemen is a question which may cause the sober citizen some moments of discomfort and loss of faith.

There is another phase of the rum-running situation that may interest the smug citizen. The bootlegger today fears the liquor bandit far more than he does the revenue man or policeman. All the roads along which booze flows into the great and thirsty city of New York are patrolled by hold-up men whose particular prey is the bootlegger hauling drinks to his customers. When such a truck comes along the bandits step out, take the driver captive, tie him up and drive off with his vehicle and its contents.

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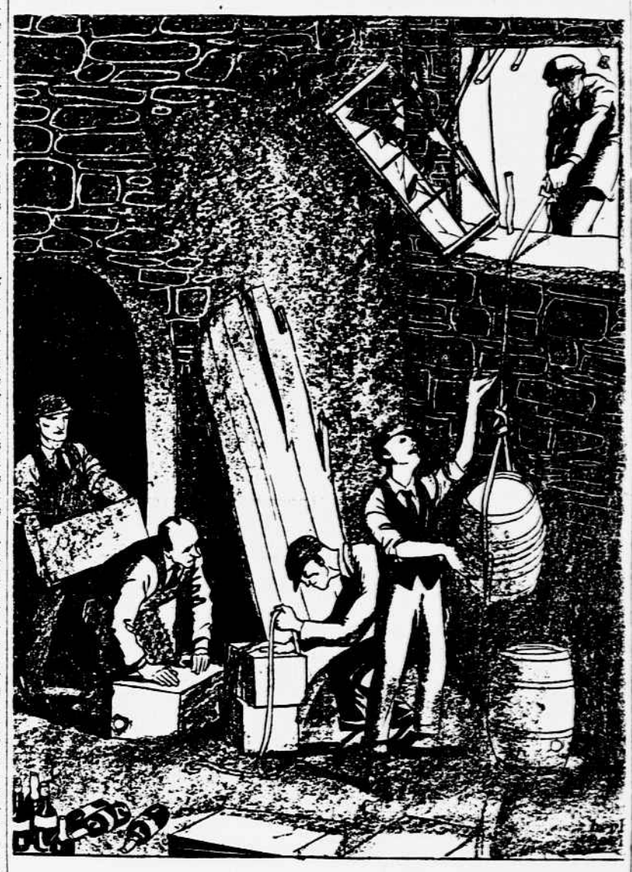
MOST persons know that a constant stream of sound liquor is flowing into New York and other cities from the Canadian border and that there are several organizations of bootleggers who bring the wet goods down from the north in motor cars and trucks. One of them told me his sad romance the other evening when he was a bit too laden with his own goods.

"They get it from Canada for so much," he said, "and let it across the line. Then they sell it to you for so much more. You load up your bus and start for New York. But now comes the stick-up guys. They're all along the roads, all the way down, and they're likely to pop out on you any minute and say, 'Hands up!' You gotta be on the lookout for them and ready to shoot first. The rum-running game is no joke."

This particular man had not been in the liquor transport business very long, but he was already prosperous to the point of dizziness. His first trip from Canada was wrecked by the hold-up men and he had to go back to driving liquor trucks for other men till he got a fresh start. But his second venture was more fortunate and he has reached the stage, after a dozen or more trips, where it doesn't matter much if the bandits do get him now and then.



"THE RICH NEW YORKER'S BOOTLEGGERS TURNED BURGLARS AND STOLE THE $22,000 WORTH OF LIQUORS THEY HAD SOLD HIM THAT DAY."

Plating on Aluminum.

SOME time ago there were reported the details of a method invented for plating on aluminum, an achievement that had long been striven for with little success. The chief difficulty appears to arise from an invisible film, which forms on aluminum when exposed to the air.

By the method mentioned this film is dissolved off in a bath containing soluble fluorides. A little free hydrofluoric acid appears to act best. Then a coating of zinc is formed on the aluminum in a plating bath, and upon this coating copper, silver and other metals may be deposited.

In order to form a gold plating the zinc covering the aluminum must first be coated thinly with copper, as otherwise the gold sinks into the zinc, and in a few weeks almost disappears.

Wettest Place on Earth.

IT appears that the wettest place in the world is Cherrapunji, in the Indian province of Assam. During the last decade the average annual rainfall was nearly thirty-seven feet. Next came the environs of Bombay, with about half of that figure. But it should be noted that at the station of Debundscha, in Kamerun, thirty-four feet of rain fell annually during the same period, chiefly in summer.

The neighborhood of warm seas and high mountains is the principal cause of these extraordinary rainfalls. It may be that the extension of meteorological observation will show other zones of rainfall more intense than has hitherto been believed, as in Java and Sumatra.

Curious Cactus.

IN the Rincon valley, eighteen miles from Tucson, Ariz., is a giant cactus the summit of which has been so deformed as to make it an object of curiosity to visitors. The inhabitants of the valley are proud of their freak cactus and refuse to allow botanists to cut the head in order to determine the cause of the deformation.

The botanists think it is due to the work of insects, but the country people believe that a stroke of lightning was the determining cause. This species of cactus, the Cereus, not infrequently develops strange forms. In this case the head has assumed the appearance of a gigantic cauliflower.